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ABSTRACT

Noting that the ways children encounter and use print in the classroom can be examined as surface and organizing content of curriculum, this article provides descriptions of innovative uses of print in the kindergarten and elementary school classroom. Curriculum "surface content" includes activities, use of classroom space, display, and materials while "organizing content" includes the purposes and functions of language. The article also offers examples of how teachers can help students use language to build representations about their world such as: posting instructions on hamster care near the classroom's hamster cage; setting up an attractive reading corner where children may select stories that they want to have read to them by parent volunteers; encouraging conversation between students and visitors about labelled objects in the classroom; and other similar activities. (ARH)

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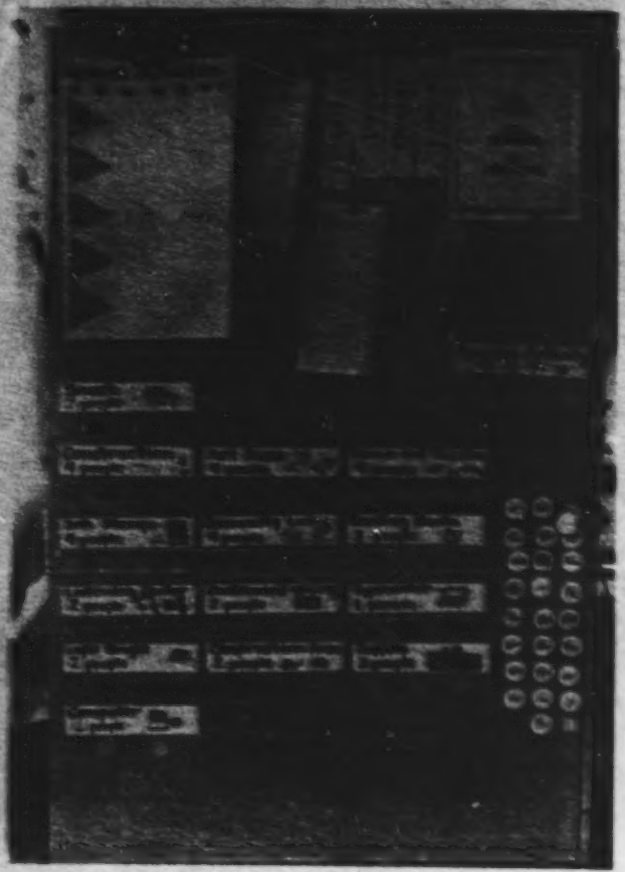

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Relationships Between Reading Activities and Language Use

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Discussion and analysis of descriptions of what is happening in classrooms provide opportunities to reflect on teaching priorities and teaching assumptions. Reflections assist in identification of priorities, values, and beliefs about children and teaching. What an observer can see happening in a classroom is the surface content (Bussis, Chittenden, and Amarel, 1976, p. 50). The surface content of the curriculum is the variety of materials and activities that a teacher plans, encourages, or merely tolerates for children (Gordon, 1979, p. 7). These aspects of the surface content can suggest the underlying organizing content of the curriculum. The learning priorities and concerns a teacher holds for children are this deeper, organizing content (Bussis, Chittenden, and Amarel, 1976, p. 50). The organizing content consists of what the teacher wants the children to know, do, feel, think, or care about, and what qualities of learning the teacher values or promotes.

The ways children encounter and use print in the classroom can be so examined as surface and organizing content of curriculum. The surface content for using print in the classroom includes the activities, display, space, and materials related to written language. The organizing content, however, tells what the purposes and functions of literate language are: i.e., how and why the print is to be used. Observations and descriptions of the use of print, the surface content of the activities and materials lead to understanding and clarification of the assumptions and beliefs about written language; in other words, the organizing content.

The descriptions in this article focus on relationships in classrooms emphasizing literate activities where print is used for different purposes and in different ways. Discussions, reflections and analyses of these observations lead to understanding of the relationships between the surface and organizing contents. These analyses are guided by categories of written language uses adapted from Halliday's functions of language (1973). These include instrumental, regulatory, personal, heuristic, imaginative, and representational functions.

In one kindergarten classroom space, time, and community involvement support children's engagement with story and books. The visual, surface content is an attractively carpeted corner. As children approach the corner, on their right they see a bulletin board at child level. A sign-up sheet states, "I want to be read to." There is plenty of space for children to write their names. There are a few cushions against one wall, and nearby there is a child-size rocking chair. Against the other wall is a four-tiered display shelf set on the floor. A variety of picture books, approximately twenty-five, are displayed on the shelves all with the entire front covers visible.

On the floor close by a container holds an additional twenty-five books with only the spines of the books showing. Both collections of books include a variety of stories, information and concept books, and poetry. The shelves and books are bounded by a small loft. Underneath the loft is a comfortable private space that is an extension of the reading area. When a classroom mother comes in and glances down at the sign-up sheet, two children come over to join her. They select a story from the display shelves and settle in next to her on the floor. One slides over a cushion and the other scoots the rocking chair next to her. As she holds the selected book on her lap, all three can see the text illustrations. She reads the story several times, and the three frequently interact about the story or an illustration. A few days after the parent's scheduled visit, one of the children goes back to the shelves, selects the same book, and moves quietly under the loft for a private revisit with the story.

Much of the organizing content of this carefully planned space, resources, and time is supportive of children extending their control over uses of print and the representation of experience through written language. Wells (1986, p. 200) states that one of the chief functions of reading and writing is that of conveying stories. In this classroom environment reading stories is valued, and children discover this as they take time to browse through books, select stories to be read aloud, discuss stories in a social setting, and return to them for further reflection in a more private way.

The sign-up sheet embodies several uses of print which support these children's lives. The sign provides a way to use print in order to fulfill a personal need such as listening to a story, an instrumental use of language. By signing the sheet children use print to schedule this experience, a regulatory use of language. By interacting with the parent, children see an adult who enjoys stories and spends time reading. In addition, children's discussions with others help them build their experiences from stories, one of the ways humans have available to them to make sense of their world. This is an imaginative function of print.

The resources which provision this corner of the classroom value browsing, choosing, and coming back to story again and again. The fifty plus books represent a small portion of the books distributed throughout the classroom. The books are frequently changed, but a range in variety of books is always included so that children can discover the literary and artistic styles available. Children are then building representations about the possibilities of the ways books are used and the needs which they can fulfill.

In another kindergarten classroom atop a three-shelf cabinet is an aquarium used to house a teddy bear hamster. The aquarium is lined with wood shavings and contains some cardboard cylinder tubes for the hamster to run through, hide in, or chew. To the left of the glassed aquarium is a commercial box of hamster food. A picture of a hamster and the word "hamster" are visible on the box front. To the top of the aquarium the teacher has taped a sign which reads:

Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear

Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, turn around
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, touch the ground
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, buckle your shoe
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, that will do
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, climb the stairs

Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, say your prayers
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, turn out the light
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, say goodnight
(Skolnik, 1974, p. 83)

Attached beneath the aquarium is another teacher-made sign that reads:

> *This is Teddy our hamster. He eats sunflower seeds and when you hold him he gets scared. He is cute and soft. We need to be nice and gentle with Teddy.*

On the bottom shelf of the cabinet are plastic teddy bear counters. The teacher has prepared a homemade mathematics game using these colored counters. All of these constitute the surface content of the curriculum.

Many concepts and experiences are integrated through the organizing content, those learning priorities that this particular teacher holds for young children who are using print. Since the hamster is a teddy bear variety, the words to a favorite jumping rope rhyme are recorded on a chart. Some of the children know this rhyme; others have just learned it. The printed rhyme invites all the children to read and enjoy the written form of a ditty they know from memory, an imaginative use of language.

The box of hamster food is deliberately kept next to the hamster's home. The words and pictures on the package provide functional environmental print from the community. Through this display the children in this classroom are experiencing how society uses written language to obtain and provide the right kind of food.

The note at the bottom of the aquarium cage is to give directions for care, a regulatory function, and more information about the hamster, a representational function. The teacher extends the theme of teddy bear by designing a game using commercial plastic teddy bears to match number sets.

This carefully planned area around the hamster's home allows children opportunities for wonderment about language and to sort out the different meanings of "Teddy Bear." In this setting children are gaining control in understanding and using written language. They are working with various functions and styles of written language, such as informational writing and rhyme.

A five-year-old in another kindergarten invites a visitor to go over to a low shelf and read a sign set next to a large seashell. Jessica says nothing as she points to the sign which says, "Did you ever see a seashell as big as Jessica's?" The visitor comments about the shell, and soon the two are engaged in conversation. At one point they go over to another shelf where there are several field guides about seashells. This surface content of a sign and a concrete object is supported by an organizing content with several teacher assumptions and priorities about children's learning. The language raises a heuristic question for continuing inquiry about shells, but it also makes print meaningful through personal identity with Jessica, who is delighted to share this communication with others.

In a Fargo, North Dakota, third grade classroom studying about Mexico, the teacher displays commercial pictures of varying aspects of Mexican life on the bulletin board. Beside each poster the teacher also posts a written statement or question that clarifies or focuses

children's attention to the particular picture. Through the teacher's accompanying written note, one picture in particular challenges children's intellectual involvement. This poster depicts a Mexican market scene in which people are bartering and shopping. The adjacent note reads:

MARKET DAY

Does this remind you of flea markets in Fargo?

The pictorial display, the signs, and the students' encounters with print are the surface content of the curriculum.

The learning priorities or organizing content reflect the teacher's view of the value of written messages within the classroom setting. The teacher uses the printed text to guide students' focus. By suggesting that the students recall their own experiences, the teacher helps them to connect the known with the unknown. The students' own community lives are tied to studying another culture in a different place in the world. Students are asked to go beyond the context of the picture and to make connections between their familiar experiences and someone else's. A higher level of thinking is required. Through the written printed message children are encouraged to use print to investigate and find out, a heuristic function of language.

Printed language can be tied to objects in order to invite inquiry. As part of a fifth grade science unit the teacher selects and places a collection of kaleidoscopes with a sign:

Kaleidoscopes

Mirrors play tricks on your .

The Eye Book by Theodore Le Sieg (1968) is displayed next to the kaleidoscopes. The visible surface content is simple; the organizing content is remarkably complex.

This small selection of materials contains many symbols. On the cover of the Eye Book is a cartoon-type rabbit whose eyes are large and appear out of proportion to the rest of its body. The rebus symbol for eyes on the sign looks very much like the rabbit's eyes on the book cover. In a subtle way, the rebus symbol encourages examination of the book since one's attention is drawn to the similarity between the cartoon figure and the rebus.

On the outside of one of the kaleidoscope tubes, decorations provide another symbol system. Mirrored designs, similar to those seen through a kaleidoscope, decorate symbolically the exterior of the cylinder tube.

Variations of the printed word are evident in the display. On the sign, only the "k" in "Kaleidoscopes" is printed with an upper case letter. The same word is printed with every letter capitalized on the exterior of another one of the kaleidoscope cylinders.

As the sign indicates, mirrors play tricks on one's eyes. Written language is used to encourage wonderment, a heuristic function of language. At the same time, the sign gives information about how the kaleidoscope works, a representational function. By posting and modeling the word "Kaleidoscope," interesting and complex language is used in context. Even the pronunciation of "Kaleidoscope" suggests a playfulness which invites experimentation with language and meanings.

These descriptions show children taking on language and using it

to be successful in the classroom. The surface content descriptions are vivid in the variety of print displayed in classroom settings. The teacher's organizing content validates that these activities are guided by powerful assumptions of written language which, indeed, encourage children to read purposefully. These planned activities promote children building representations about their world through using language. The study of the relationship between the surface and organizing contents helps teachers develop better understanding and control of translating their learning priorities into learning activities. Recognizing the ties between the reading activities and language use will direct teachers in providing richer experiences for children's learning.

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